

Congressman Steve Rothman-- Hurricane Katrina Relief Update

Congressman

NEWS RELEASE

Steve Rothman

New Jersey, District 9

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HURRICANE KATRINA RELIEF UPDATE
CONGRESSMAN STEVE ROTHMAN
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Washington, DC -- Congressman Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn) released the following statement today on the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts:

"Today, to provide immediate funding relief, I voted in favor of H.R. 3673, the Second Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Hurricane Katrina Response, which was introduced last night and passed the House on a vote of 410-11. This bill will provide an additional \$51.8 billion for hurricane relief, with \$50 billion going to rescue and cleanup activities by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), \$1.4 billion for hurricane-related activities by the military, and \$400 million for the Army Corps of Engineers for restoration work on navigation locks and for channel dredging. The measure also includes \$15 million for an investigation of the federal response and recovery operations and also requires the Homeland Security Department to provide the House and Senate Appropriations committees with weekly reports on how it is using the funds starting next week.

I am pleased that the Second Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill overwhelmingly passed the House today. My colleagues and I want to make sure that our brothers and sisters, whose lives have been devastated by this catastrophe, know that we are here to provide them with the help they need.

I am, however, disheartened with our government's failure to sufficiently prepare and then send immediate aid to the most devastated areas. That is why I have called for the director of FEMA, Michael Brown, to resign from his position. Additionally, I am a cosponsor of the National Emergency Management Restoration and Improvement Act, which would reestablish FEMA as an agency with Cabinet-level authority and separate from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Five years ago, FEMA had a reputation as one of the best-performing agencies in government. However, since the transfer of FEMA into DHS, inexperienced political leadership, bureaucratic bungling, and funding cuts have severely

eroded FEMA's capacity to respond.

I find it completely unacceptable that FEMA Director Michael Brown waited hours after Hurricane Katrina made landfall before asking his boss, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, to dispatch 1,000 Homeland Security employees to the region and gave them two days to get there. With our advanced tracking systems and detailed forecasts, it was wrong for Mr. Brown to sit on this information and fail to act quickly to protect our people.

To ensure that the victims of Hurricane Katrina are protected at all costs, I have sent a number of letters advocating this course to the Congressional leadership as well as to President Bush and members of his Cabinet. For example, over the coming weeks, the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have been left with nothing will need Medicaid for health coverage until they get back on their feet. That is why I sent a letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert urging him to abandon the proposed \$10 billion cut to Medicaid in the Budget Reconciliation legislation. I also sent a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt urging them to guarantee that the federal government meets the healthcare needs of the victims who have been psychologically affected by this unprecedented disaster.

Earlier this week, I also became a proud cosponsor of three additional important pieces of legislation. The first is the Anti-Price Gouging Act, which makes the act of price gouging a federal crime. Price gouging sometimes occurs as a direct consequence of a natural disaster when there is an excessive price increase for gasoline, food, water, and lodging in the areas directly affected by the disaster. During a time when consumers are dealing with significant personal losses, I am appalled to learn of the many cases of alleged price gouging occurring throughout the country. Price gouging hurts Americans who are in need of basic necessities during this state of emergency.

Another piece of legislation I have cosponsored would relieve the debt burden that has been placed on Hurricane Katrina survivors. The bill would prevent the new bankruptcy law, which will go into effect in October 2005, from having unintended and potentially dangerous consequences for the hundreds of thousands of individuals who are now facing financial ruin. This legislation will provide needed flexibility for victims of natural disasters who are involved in bankruptcy proceedings.

I have also cosponsored the Katrina College Act, which would provide relief to students, families and student borrowers directly affected by Hurricane Katrina. This bill would waive the amount of Pell Grants that students are required to repay when they withdraw from school due to this disaster, recalculate the amount families are expected to pay towards college for the current academic term and next year, and also provide student borrowers who live in the affected areas with six months where they do not need to make college loan payments and interest on their loans will not accrue.

In response to those who were horrified to learn that pet owners were told to leave their pets behind during this devastation, I was very pleased to learn that the Humane Society, and other pet-friendly organizations, are currently taking steps to collect pets, farm animals, even captive and exotic wildlife, and then provide them with shelter with the intent of returning them to their rightful owners once they find suitable housing.

The Katrina disaster presents one of the greatest challenges our nation has ever faced. Potentially thousands of lives lost-hundreds of thousands of jobs and homes lost-nearly a million people displaced and countless billions in economic damages. But we can meet this challenge if we are realistic about the sacrifices that will be required of us. This is the greatest nation in the world and I am confident that we can and will recover from this."

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